



## News Release

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### Sexual Violence Survivors in Alberta Say Wait Times for Trauma Counselling Are Life Threatening

**Alberta, January 25, 2023** – Sexual violence in Alberta is a crisis requiring immediate action. A persistent, ongoing increase in demand for specialized sexual assault services spiked in 2017 with a massive culture shift linked to the global #MeToo movement and Alberta’s own #IBelieveYou campaign, and increased yet again due to the pandemic.

Demand for specialized support services will continue to increase given that 43% of Albertans have experienced sexual violence in their lifetime, and because statistics show crimes of sexual assault are not decreasing like other violent crimes.

1.8 million Albertans have experienced sexual violence in their lifetime. The growing number of Albertans asking for help has resulted in wait times for trauma counselling that exceed one year in some parts of the province.

Any wait is unacceptable and can have devastating impacts on survivors.

“Some of the other men I met in group counselling were just barely functioning. You could just see in their eyes they’re defeated. So, when I imagine people like myself and these men waiting for a year or more for counselling it makes me feel fearful. Not all survivors are as lucky as I am, not all of us have the strength to hang on. The reality is that not all of us will make it,” says Neil Campbell, Survivor.

AASAS, on behalf of sexual assault services across Alberta, brought this crisis to the attention of the Alberta Government seven months ago, presenting them with research, copious data, and a business case for enhanced and ongoing resources to increase specialized support and prevention services in our province.

Since then, we have been working with government staff, talking to Ministers, and fighting for survivors.

The response from government staff for one-time funding for counselling, but nothing for access to justice or prevention, is not an adequate response to the needs of Albertans – for a number of ethical, operational, clinical, and logistical reasons.

We are aware budget decisions are being made this month. We see other issues being addressed, but not sexual violence. Is sexual violence not a priority for this government?

Sexual violence is a known risk factor for other public health issues including addictions, suicide, homelessness, and chronic mental illness. Investing up front in education, prevention and sexual violence treatment will result in cost savings in the long run.

Albertans who have experienced the trauma of sexual violence deserve specialized, trauma-informed, evidence-based services, and they deserve them in a timely manner.

“Specialized training is so essential for anyone who works with survivors of trauma. They understand what you’re going through, and what’s happening in your head - sometimes more than you even understand it yourself,” says Elizabeth Halpin, Survivor. “When you have a trauma-informed therapist, you don’t have to painstakingly relive the worst day of your life over and over again in order to get help. To be believed, and understood, right from the beginning of my treatment made all the difference in the world.”

“On behalf of all survivors across Alberta - who are your friends, coworkers and family members – I ask you to contact your provincial government representative and let them know that they deserve recovery and healing services, they deserve justice, they deserve to be heard and supported,” urged Deb Tomlinson, CEO of AASAS. “Encourage your MLA to make sexual violence prevention, and the health of Alberta communities a priority by providing adequate and sustainable funding to our sexual assault services.”

### **Fast Facts**

- 43% or 1.8 million Albertans have experienced sexual violence in their lifetime (AASAS, 2020)
- The negative health consequences associated with experiencing sexual violence have been confirmed in numerous peer-reviewed research journals over the last several decades (Dworkin & Schumacher, 2016).
- Sexual violence is a known risk factor for other public health issues including addictions, suicide, homelessness, and domestic violence (Capaldi et al., 2012).
- The crime of sexual violence presents a major risk to public safety. According to the 2019 General Social Survey, only 6% of sexual assault survivors in Canada reported their assault to the police (Cotter, 2019). In other words, when sexual assault occurs, 94% of offenders will not be held responsible.
- While the overall rate of violent crimes in Canada has decreased over the past 15 years, the rate of sexual assault has not (Cotter, 2019).
- In 2021, police-reported sexual assault increased 21% in Alberta (Statistics Canada, 2022).